

EDWARDS (N.B.)

# HISTORICAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

MIDDLESEX NORTH DISTRICT

MEDICAL SOCIETY,

JULY 28, 1880,

—BY—

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DR. N. B. EDWARDS,

OF NORTH CHELMSFORD.



LOWELL, MASS.:

STONE, BACHELLER & LIVINGSTON, PRINTERS, 18 JACKSON STREET.

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*Mr. President and Fellows of the  
Middlesex North District Medical  
Society:*

I have thought that a brief review of the history and membership of the Middlesex North District Medical Society might be of interest to the older members of the society by recalling memories of the past, and to those who have more recently entered its ranks, by imparting to them an imperfect knowledge of that society whose interests and welfare have passed into their keeping, and whose future growth and usefulness is to be what they shall be pleased to make it. Its past history of thirty-five years is only written in what has become a matter of record by its secretaries and treasurers, and what has been fixed in the memories of its members. Although not one of its constituent members, I have, "as man and boy," attended a very large part of its meetings. I say "as man and boy," for being a student with Doctors Huntington and Kimball at the time of its organization, I had the privilege of attending its meetings as a student, and think I was benefited and instructed by listening to the papers read, the cases reported, the discussions carried on, and by witnessing the operations performed by its early members at their stated meetings. This continuous attendance upon its meetings and

association with its fellows has kept up an interest in its welfare, and a knowledge of its history that few, living, possess.

The Massachusetts Medical Society was incorporated by an act of the legislature, passed November 1, 1781. By an act passed March 8, 1803, after making provision for the choice of counsellors of the society, it provides that "the said Counsellors, upon the application of any five members of the said Society, may establish, within such districts and portions of this Commonwealth as they shall think expedient, subordinate Societies and meetings, to consist of the fellows of the said Corporation residing within such districts respectively, wherein the communication of cases and experiments may be made, and the diffusion of knowledge in medicine may be encouraged and promoted; and the Counsellors aforesaid, upon application from such subordinate Societies, may appoint five examiners or censors, within such districts, who shall be authorized and empowered to examine such candidates for the practice of physic and surgery as shall present themselves for such examination \* \* \* And the members of such subordinate Society shall be holden to report to the Counsellors of the general society all such cases as shall be selected for their importance and utility; and the said sub-

ordinate societies shall be subject to the regulations of the general society, in all matters wherein the general Society shall be concerned."

By chapter xx. of the Revised Statutes, enacted in 1836, the state was divided into four districts to be entitled respectively the first, second, third, and fourth Medical Districts. The First District included the counties of Suffolk, Essex, Middlesex, Norfolk, Bristol, Plymouth, Barnstable, Dukes County, and Nantucket; the Second District, the county of Worcester; the Third District the counties of Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire; the Fourth District, the county of Berkshire. This first comprehensive division of the state seems to have been made for the convenience of examining persons to become licentiates, or members of the parent society, as by the same act, the counsellors of the State Society were required to appoint, from among the fellows of the society, not less than twenty censors, five in each of the districts, and each five so appointed, was to be an independent board of censors to examine applicants for membership, and to determine their fitness to become members, the examinations heretofore having been made "at a meeting of not less than three of the censors appointed by the counsellors, held in the town of Boston, or by boards of censors of subordinate societies, as provided in the act of 1803."

By the provisions of the above chapter xx. of the Revised statutes, the Counsellors were authorized to subdivide, or alter any of the above four districts, and to make new districts, and appoint censors therefor, whenever the public good may seem to require it.

At a special meeting of the physicians of Lowell held March 8, 1839, the Lowell Medical Association was formed, and on the 26th of the same month, rules and regulations and a code

of Medical Police were adopted. This was a voluntary, and independent organization, the object of which was the promotion of the knowledge of medicine and surgery in general, among its members. The members of this society were Doctors Elisha Bartlett, Patrick P. Campbell, John C. Dalton, James W. Ford, John O. Green, John W. Graves, Stephen M. Gale, William Gray, Elisha Huntington, Jeremiah P. Jewett, Gilman Kimball, Daniel Mowe, George Mansfield, Harlin Pillsbury, Hiram Parker, Otis Perham, John D. Pillsbury, Benjamin Skelton, Isaac Scribner and David Wells. All the above physicians except Doctors Bartlett, Ford and Gale were among the constituent members of the Middlesex District Medical Society. Having learned and enjoyed the benefits of such association, and of their meetings, they, in due time became the originators and nucleus of a more extensive organization, having a *legal* existence, possessed of *legal* rights and privileges, acting under a charter granted by the Counsellors of the Massachusetts Medical Society.

Under authority of the act of 1803, and the provisions of the Revised Statutes, the Middlesex Medical Society was formed Nov. 18, 1844, consisting of all those members of the Massachusetts Medical Society who resided in Lowell, Billerica, Ashby, Townsend, Pepperell, Dunstable, Groton, Shirley, Tyngsborough, Chelmsford, Concord, Littleton, Dracut, Carlisle, Tewksbury, and Acton. Since its formation its name has been changed from "The Middlesex Medical Society," to The Middlesex North District Medical Society, the Middlesex South, and the Middlesex East Societies having been formed in 1850, within the county, and the whole state divided into seventeen districts. The limits of the district have been diminished by annexing the towns of Ashby, Townsend, Shirley, and Ayer to the Worcester

North Society, and Concord to the Middlesex South Society. The town of Westford seems, from some cause, to have been left out of the list of towns, and its resident physicians, Doctors Benj. Osgood and Sidney Drinkwater were not included among the constituent members of the Society.\*

The first catalogue, printed in 1845 by S. J. Varney, contains the names of 53 fellows. Of this number, not more than twelve can now be found among the living, forty-one, at least, having yielded to "the last great enemy," to the warding off whose approach to others, they had devoted their strength and energies. The survivors are Doctors Nathan Allen, John O. Green and Gilman Kimball, of Lowell, Austin Marsh of Carlisle, Daniel Parker of Billerica; James O. Parker of Shirley, Miles Spaulding and George Stearns, of Groton, Josiah Curtis, of Knoxville, Tenn; John G. T. Leach and Cyrus Mason of Brooklyn, N. Y. and Thomas Womersley of Greenfield. The average ages of forty of the above deceased fellows, whose ages at their decease have been ascertained, was 65 and 33-40 years; certainly a good old age, when compared with the average lot of humanity. The average ages of thirty-one fellows who have died, having become fellows since its organization, is only 45 years. The youngest of the constituent members, at his death, was, Dr. John Bertram of Townsend, who died at the age of thirty, while the oldest, Dr. John Walton, of Pepperell, reached the advanced age of 92 years.

Of the original 53 members, Lowell furnished the largest number, viz. : 22. The other 31 members were distributed as follows: Acton had 1; Asby, 3; Billerica, 3; Carlisle, 1; Concord, 2;

Chelmsford, 2; Dracut, 2; Dunstable, 1; Groton, 7; Littleton, 1; Pepperell, 2; Shirley, 2; Townsend, 1; Tewksbury, 1; Tyngsboro', 2. Since 1845, 165 fellows have joined the society, making a total of 218 fellows since its organization. Of the 165 new members Lowell has furnished 108; the other 57 have been distributed as follows: Acton has had 3, Ashby, 3; Billerica, 7; Chelmsford, 2; Concord, 1; Dracut 2; Dunstable, 0; Carlisle, 0; Groton, 2; Ayer, 3; Littleton, 3; Pepperell, 7; Tewksbury, 7; Townsend, 4; Tyngsborough, 5; Westford 2 at its organization and 7 since.

It has become a proverb that ministers should be settled on wheels, as they literally have no abiding city. From the history of our society it is evident that physicians do not always find a *permanent* home when they take up a residence in a given place. Of the original 53 fellows, 20 left for new homes before their death. Of the 165 who have since become fellows, 82 have sought new fields of usefulness and labor; and not a few of those have died among us and of those who are still fellows of our society have tried other homes than those within our limits. Of the original 22 fellows in Lowell, 10 have died in Lowell and 5 elsewhere, in new homes. Of the 21 deaths of fellows who have become residents in Lowell since the organization of the society 9 have died while residents of the city, and 12 have found other fields of labor previous to their death. Of the 212 physicians who have been fellows since the society was formed 44 have died within its limits, and there are now 62 living members, making 106 who have died within our limits, or who are still residents, while 112, or more than one half of the whole number have died, or now reside elsewhere.

Should any of our younger fellows become discouraged, feeling that they are not appreciated in their present

\* At the annual meeting of the District Society, in May, 1848, voted, "That the Standing Committee petition the State Society to include the town of Westford in this District."



position, and that they have not yet found their appropriate field for labor, and should they be impelled by circumstances to seek a new home, it may afford them a crumb of comfort to know that their case is not peculiar; that others before them have had like experiences and trials, and that some have fancied, at least, that they have found at last the very niche in the temple of fame they were fitted to fill. Nor should any of us feel that an unheard of event has occurred when one advanced in years, and apparently crowned with honors, decides to cultivate a new field and build up a new home; for such things have transpired within the limits of our own society.

In the treasurer's book in my possession, and now in use for keeping treasurer's accounts, I find the following:

"Records of the Middlesex District Society.

At the organization of the Society, in November 18\*, 1844, the charter granted by the State Society was accepted, and the following officers elected for the year:

Nehemiah Cutter, Pepperell,	President.
Elisha Huntington, Lowell, V.	President.
J. D. Pillsbury,	Secretary.
J. P. Jewett,	Treasurer.
I. W. Scribner,	Librarian.
Augustus Pierce,	} Standing Committee."
Elisha Huntington,	
H. Pillsbury,	

On the second page is a record of the officers chosen at the annual meeting, May 21, 1845, when the same officers were re-elected, with the exception of Dr. D. Wells, on the standing committee, instead of Augustus Pierce. There is also the following record: "J. C. Dalton, E. Huntington, H. Pillsbury, P. Bradley, Z. Howe, D. Wells were *nominated*† as suitable candidates for counsellors." May 12, 1846, the treas-

urer, in his annual report, credits himself with \$1.64, cash balance, to be carried to a new account.

At the annual meeting "holden in City Hall, May 19, 1847, the old officers were re-elected, with the exception of Dr. Wells, on the standing committee, whose place was filled by Dr. A. H. Brown. N. Cutter, H. Pillsbury, J. C. Dalton, E. Huntington, G. Kimball, J. Bartlett, J. W. Graves and A. B. Bancroft were *chosen* counsellors.

Since its organization, its privileges, as well as its duties, have been increased. Instead of *nominating* suitable candidates for counsellors, we now *choose* our own, as well as our own censors, who were formerly appointed by the counsellors of the State Society. We now choose one of our own counsellors a member of the nominating committee to nominate officers of the parent Society, each district society in the state having an equal voice in the nomination of the officers of the State Society.

The treasurer of the State Society was formerly required to collect all assessments due the society, and to notify the treasurers of the several district societies, on the first day of January, of the amount of assessments due the parent society from the fellows of his district society, and the treasurers of the district societies were then to collect the same and to pay the amount to the treasurer of the State Society. Under these regulations, the treasurer of this society once received a list of 48 fellows, who owed the parent society \$234, or assessments in sums from \$3.00 to \$32.00 each, being 78 assessments of three dollars each, due from 48 fellows.

Now payments are demanded in advance, and no fellow can partake of the annual dinner or receive the publications of the society until he has paid his annual assessment, which the treasurer of the district society is required to collect, as far as practicable.

\* The Secretary's Record Book gives the date Nov. 16.

† The Secretary's Record Book states that the fellows were *elected* counsellors.



Our society has had at least 18 presidents, Doctors Allen, J. C. Bartlett, Cutter, Dalton, Graves, Huntington, Jewett, Kimball, H. Pillsbury, Jonathan Brown, Dickey, Howard, Fox, Geo. H. Pillsbury, Pinkham, Savory and Joel Spaulding. Nine of these were constituent members of the society, some of whom were honored with repeated re-elections. The number of vice presidents has been about the same. The number of secretaries has been less, while only three different fellows have held the office of treasurer. Dr. J. P. Jewett held the office from 1844 to 1848, inclusive, five years; Dr. L. B. Morse from 1849 to 1851, inclusive, three years. The present incumbent from 1852, 28 years.

At the first, the regular meetings of the society were held quarterly, in rooms hired for that purpose; afterward in the City Hall, the upper part of the building now known as the Government Building on Merrimack Street. In 1848 or 1849, Dr. Jewett, who was a member of the Mechanics' Library Association, secured from that association the use of a room or rooms in Mechanics' Building for the use of the society, free of rent, at an annual expense of from two to five dollars a year, paid to the janitor of that building, for warming and care of the room. These annual payments were made till 1868. About that time the Association needed the room for other purposes, and our society afterward occupied such room as was vacant at the time of the meeting, without charge for heating, or care, until the last year, when the present arrangements were made with Nichols and Hutchins.

The meetings, during the first years, were held quarterly, and at each, one or two members, by appointment, as now, read a paper, or papers, which were afterward discussed; important or interesting cases were reported verbally

or in writing, which were made the subject of discussion; patients were brought into the meetings for exhibition, examination, or to be operated upon. After a time the meetings began to be less fully attended, and it was voted to hold the meetings monthly, instead of quarterly. The new arrangement revived the interest of the fellows in the meetings, and for several years they were well attended, and often quite interesting. Finally, jealousy and distrust found place in the breasts of some of the fellows, and the coldness and ill will towards one another had its influence in diminishing the interest in the meetings of the society, and the attendance became very irregular, those appointed to furnish papers failing to perform their allotted part, and those present being unwilling or unprepared to entertain each other until it was thought to be time wasted to attend the meetings. Frequently no quorum was present, and from three to six fellows met and adjourned, the record, read and approved at the subsequent meeting, being substantially as follows: "Lowell, such a year month and day, society met at usual place, called to order by the president, vice-president, or secretary, as the case might be. The records of the last meeting were read and approved; no quorum being present, the meeting adjourned." One meeting in the year was usually an exception to this rule. The annual meeting was generally fully attended. The opposite parties rallied their hosts, and the time was spent in a contest for officers for the ensuing year. The contest was sometimes quite animated, the two parties being nearly equal. At one annual meeting, two proxy votes were cast, under the supposed sanction of a by-law of the parent society, by which it was assumed that the officers were elected. At the next meeting the opposing party declared the recorded

election null and void, and that, under by-laws of the state and district societies, the old officers held over, and were *de facto*, the officers for the current year, no new officers having been legally elected at the annual meeting.

Hoping there might be enough of interest surviving in the fellows of the society to make a meeting once in three months profitable "for the agreeable and improving interchange of thoughts and opinions on medical topics; for the production and discussion of rare medical cases; for the exhibition and inspection of specimens of morbid anatomy and for social intercourse among liberal and enlightened men," it was finally voted to hold the meetings quarterly, instead of monthly.

This return to quarterly meetings had only a temporary influence upon the attendance and interest in the meetings of the society; spasmodic efforts were crowned with temporary success, and the records became, but too often, like those quoted above.

During the past year a new departure has been taken, and it is hoped that the new element in our meetings, that affecting the alimentary canal, and, through that, the whole physical

organization, may contribute to the development of good feeling, by friendly intercourse and the cultivation of the social qualities, the interchange of common civilities, and the recognition of a common brotherhood, as men and as fellows of the same society, until unanimity of action and object at the festal board shall only be an index of the unanimity of feeling and purpose in all the professional acts of life, and all shall strive to make our society what it should be, and what it may be, when each shall do his part to elevate and ennoble the profession we have chosen for life; and we shall all become mutual educators of ourselves and efficient co-workers in warding off and relieving the physical and mental ills to which our common humanity is heir.

To this end let us bury all past animosities, jealousies and differences, and let each of us feel that we can and should do something to make our meetings so interesting and so profitable that we cannot afford to lose their advantages, and our society shall take a respectable, yes, a high stand among its fellow societies, and the improvement of each and all of its members, and the health and comfort of those among whom we daily move shall be secured.



